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EXPANSION OF THE ARAUCANIANS IN ARGENTINA

By Salvador Canals Frau

The campaign of General Roca in the year 1879 against tribes of the south put an end to the Indian domination of the entire region of the Pampa. Several tribes which up to that time had ruled the greater part of the Pampa Húmeda, or the eastern section, and the Región del Monte, or the western section, were dispersed or driven beyond the Río Negro, the northern boundary of Patagonia. The central plain of Argentina subsequently was definitely and completely opened to civilization. Thus ended elementary and open warfare that had begun the very moment that the Spaniards established themselves on the right bank of the Río de la Plata. The original Buenos Aires was founded in 1536 by the first Governor of the Río de la Plata, Don Pedro de Mendoza, but had to be abandoned later. In 1580, General Juan de Garay founded the present city. In both instances there were open conflicts with the Indians who ruled the plains.

The Indians who occupied the region of the Pampa in the 16th century, and who had contacts first with Don Pedro de Mendoza and later with Don Juan de Garay, were ethnically different from those whom General Roca drove out during the second half of the 19th century. Culturally, they might have seemed alike, but racially and linguistically they were distinct. From time to time, during the three centuries between 1580 and 1879, the Indian population of the vast geographical area known as the Pampa underwent a notable change. The primitive population of the plains in 1580 was Patagonian in racial type and was, therefore, racially and culturally similar to the other peoples of Patagonia. It was particularly like its northern neighbors the Puelche (Tehuelche) and the Patagonians, and its northern neighbors, the Guarpard. The population which General Roca drove out in 1879, however, resembled in outward appearance the Araucanians of Chile, whose language they also spoke (map 1, No. 10). The Araucanians are usually classified racially and culturally with the peoples of the Andes, who have the highest culture in South America.

One might ask how this change in population came about and what were the causes. Fortunately, we have a series of historical facts which enable us to follow, almost step by step, the interesting process by which a people move almost 600 miles (1,000 km.) from their origi-

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nal home and gradually invade an extensive plain, which they settle without violent struggle or population displacement. This ethnic replacement was accompanied by a process of adaptation and fusion, through which a population that originally possessed an Andean culture was transformed, doubtless by the impact of a new environment, into a people who lived on cattle raising, collecting wild foods, and pillage.

The *Araucanians* were the native peoples of Chile, dwelling originally in the plains between the Andes and the sea, south of the *Atacama*. Father Luis de Valdivia, the first to write a grammar and lexicon of their language, gives in his book published in 1606 a good delineation of the area which *Araucanian*-speaking Indians then inhabited. In addition to stating that "in the entire realm of Chile there was no other language," he added that the *Araucanians* extended from Coquimbo, in the north, to Chiloé in the south, and "from the foot of the great snowy Cordillera to the sea." According to this and other early records, the habitat of the native *Araucanians* did not include the Cordillera but was within the limits indicated above.

East of the Cordillera distributed from north to south in what is today Argentine territory, and partly in the Cordillera itself, were three close neighbors of the *Araucanians*. These were distinct peoples, who were related to one another and belonged to the same linguistic group, the *Huarpe-Comechingón*. They differed from the people of Chile in appearance, language, and culture. We are especially interested in the southernmost of these non-*Araucanian* peoples, who, because they dwelt in the Andean region of pine groves, were commonly called *Pehuenche* (in *Araucanian*, pehuen, "pine," + che, "people"). This group of mountaineers was the first to be *Araucanized*, that is, it was the first of those to the east of the *Araucanians* which received their influence and infiltrations.

Numerous facts, in addition to language, already mentioned, clearly prove that the inhabitants of the pine forests, though later *Araucanian*, did not originally belong to this group. Thus, the Chilean chronicler Mariño de Lovera related that a Spanish reconnaissance expedition made in 1563 under the leadership of Pedro de Leiva discovered a type of people in the Cordillera who differed from that of Chile in being taller and thinner and in subsisting on nuts of the Araucaria pine (*Araucaria imbricata*). Later, the Chilean anthropologist, R. E. Latcham, found vestiges of this ancient, tall, and dolichocephalic population both among the short brachycephals who inhabited the region toward the end of the last century and in ancient burial grounds in the same area.

This earliest tall, thin, dolichocephalic people, who neither spoke *Araucanian* nor cultivated the soil, and whose ancient habitat coincides approximately with that of the Araucaria pine, i. e., the Cordil-

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lers between lat. 37° and 40° S., was the first to be *Araucanized.* 161
This process must have begun in the middle of the 17th century, 197
as we can clearly see from the records of a famous criminal trial
held in Mendoza in 1658. On this occasion, some captured *Pehuenche* 144
who testified under oath, spoke only their own language and had no knowledge of *Araucanian*, but the names of some chiefs and certain cultural elements were already characteristic of the *Araucanians*. This elemental process of *Auracanization* must have terminated toward the end of the same century, for according to the 18th-century documents, the *Pehuenche* already spoke the *Araucanian* language. Jerónimo Pietas (1846), e. g., attests this in his "Costumbres de los Araucanos."

The *Araucanians* were led to influence the people of the Cordillera 177
and later of the eastern plains as a result of their war against the conquistadors. From the beginning, the Indians of Chile adopted Spanish war tactics and equipment, especially the horse. To procure horses, which were so important to warfare, they went to the plains of Argentina, which were densely inhabited by these quadrupeds. After the Spaniards abandoned the original Buenos Aires in 1541, they left horses, which multiplied so rapidly in this favorable environment with its abundant herbaceous plains that during the 17th and 18th centuries there were hundreds of thousands of horses in wild herds.

During this period, culture exchange among the indigenous population was intensified: The *Pampa*, or pre-*Araucanian* inhabitants of the plains, gave horses; the *Araucanians*, or inhabitants of Chile, gave textiles and other elements of a higher culture. The *Pehuenche*, who lived amid both, were the intermediaries.

Other geographic factors also facilitated cultural exchange. The [133]
Andes in the region of the Araucaria pine, domain of the *Pehuenche*, are relatively low with numerous passes which are open throughout the year. Moreover, the Chilean region opposite the *Pehuenche* habitat had the greatest concentration of *Araucanians* engaged in war; the latter frequently took refuge in the Cordillera. Finally, the territories east of *Pehuenche* were never occupied by the Spaniards, thus leaving the mountaineers free to move at will.

All these reasons brought the continuous *Araucanian* infiltrations first to the *Pehuenche*. Once this people was *Araucanized*, the great expansion on the eastern side of the mountain range began. Its base was the *Pehuenche* region or western part of Neuquén, from which it extended toward the north and the east, gradually occupying the greater part of the Argentine central plain and bordering regions.

The first expansion of the now-*Araucanized Pehuenche* was to the 167
north, and it invaded the southern part of the present Province of Mendoza. This region had been the ancient domain of the *Puelche* de Cuyo, the second of the three previously mentioned non-*Araucanian*

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167 peoples who were eastern neighbors of the *Araucanians*. In 1658, they were still masters of their own destiny, for various persons who made statements in the aforementioned criminal proceedings knew only their own language, whereas 100 years later they all spoke *Araucanian*, and only the old people still remembered their ancient tongue. This is what we are told by Father Havestadt, a Jesuit missionary who, in 1750, visited Malargüé, the principal center of these ancient people. After that date, the *Puelche* de Cuyo disappeared as an ethnic entity, to be transformed into a mere subdivision of the *Araucanized Pehuenche*.

The second expansion was to the east. Documents point to its presence north of the Pampean region in 1708. In this same year, at a meeting of Indians of different origins held at Las Pulgas near what is called today Villa Mercedes, on the Río Quinto, some Indian chiefs who were not yet *Araucanized* had brought to the council "Aucáes Indians or Indians of the War of Chile." At that period, the *Araucanians* on the eastern side of the Andes were known as *Auca* (*Araucanian* for enemy, traitor, or contrary), or "uprisen."

A year later, in 1709, they were also found in the region east of the Pampa. It is stated in an official document that one of the expeditions that went south from Buenos Aires every year in search of salt had met with a great number of *Auca* who were taking large herds of cattle and horses toward Chile. Some weeks later, at the meeting of the "Cabildo" de Buenos Aires, held on February 10, 1710, it was stated that a great number of the *Auca* Indians from the Chilean Cordillera went to the plains to steal cattle.

At first, these visitors limited themselves to exercising their influence upon the pre-*Araucanian Pampa* of the plains and to carrying off the wild cattle. But soon they attacked the Spanish settlements and committed all kinds of depredations against stock farmers in the vicinity of Buenos Aires. In 1715, the presence of *Serrano* is noted. *Serrano* was the common term for the Indians of the Cordillera, that is, the *Araucanized Pehuenche*. Ten years later, it was suggested that an expedition be sent from Buenos Aires "in order that the *Aucáes* and *Serranos* who inhabited the vicinity of the city be driven out." Thus, we can establish 1725 as the approximate date in which the *Araucanians* were definitely established in the great plains.

Once these *Araucanians* were established among the primitive *Pampa* they were the most dynamic element, and rapidly became the dominant one. That is why the Englishman, Father Thomas Falkner, could state in his well-known "Description of Patagonia" (1774) that his experience as missionary in the Jesuit settlements south of Buenos Aires showed that the *Araucanian* language "was the most generally understood" among the Indian populations of the plains.

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In this period, a small group of *Pampa* still spoke their native language, but later this speech disappeared under the *Araucanian* avalanche that descended from the Cordillera. By the end of the same century, the *Araucanians*, who had at first infiltrated among the *Pehuenche* living in the mountains, controlled all the extensive area between the vicinity of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, San Luis, and the Río Negro, between the Cordillera and the sea.

In their immense territories, the newly arrived *Araucanians* were split into various distinct and frequently rival groups. They never formed states, for their social organization was not stratified, and they lacked permanent homes. But real dynasties of chieftains who succeeded each other were developed, and some of them became permanently established in definite places.

It is clear that these more or less rival groups, consisting of seminomadic Indians, had no definitely bounded territories that separated one from the other. Moreover, the number of chieftainships was changeable. Each chief with his people was subject to a higher chief. If dissatisfied with his superior, he took his movable tents and became the subject of another, or he himself became an independent chief.

Three of these chieftainships, however, were permanent, doubtless because they were based on the distinct physiography of the land. The first was that of the *Pehuenche*, who, in the latter part of the 18th century, were pressing toward the northeast, and at the beginning of the 19th century inhabited not only the Cordillera proper but all the territories east of the Andes to the Chadileuvú or Salado River, between the Diamante River on the north and the Limay River on the south.

The second group, located east of the first, occupied the western side of the Pampa, commonly called "región del monte" because of its xerophytic vegetation. The *Araucanians* called it Mamüll-Mapú, the "woody region." Its inhabitants were known as *Ranquel* (in the *Araucanian* language, rankul means a field of common reed grass). Its more permanent center, where the general chief lived, was a place called Leubucó, long. 64° 40′ W. and lat. 35° 50′ S.

Finally, the third group inhabited the region commonly called the humid Pampa (Pampa húmeda) or herbaceous Pampa, which is the eastern part of the plains. Because of their habitat, these Indians were often called *Pampista* or just *Pampa*, but they should not be confused with the true *Pampa*, who occupied this region previous to the *Araucanians*. The principal headquarters of these natives was the Salinas Grandes zone near Macachín, which lies in the present territory of La Pampa.

As the fundamental factors in the fusion and adaptation of elements were almost the same throughout the area inhabited by the Argentine

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Araucanians, the results should everywhere be identical or similar. Considering the *Araucanian's* manner of living, the century and a half of their occupation of the territory east of the Andes was not sufficient time for them to become differentiated. The different groups of eastern *Araucanians* remained very similar to one another in their physical appearance as well as in their culture and language.

We lack exact anthropometric data on the Argentine *Araucanian* stature, but according to different historical sources they were of a "medium" stature, that is, an average height of 5.4 to 5.6 feet (1.65 to 1.70 m.). This is understandable because they were the result of the mixture of the short *Araucanians* of Chile with the taller *Pehuenche* and the other Pampa tribes.

According to craniological measurements published by Ten Kate (1893), the majority (80.6 percent) of the *Araucanians* from the plains are brachycephalic like those of Chile, and 19.4 percent are dolicocephalic like the old *Pampa*. This is as would be expected.

Their culture was also of mixed origin. Features of *Pampa* origin included their lack of cultivation of the soil; use of the classic skin toldo; the bolas (boleadors) as the principal weapon, together with the spear; their diet of half-raw mare meat and hot blood, and their mythology and the name of their spirit of evil, Gualichu. From Chile came men's and women's garments, ornaments, weaving, silverwork, wooden plates, spears up to 16 feet (5 m.) long, part of their social organization, and some funeral practices.

Finally, their language differed from that of Chile in certain peculiarities, such as their tendency to change the *r* into *s* and the *t* into *ch*.

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